



## SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES AND MENTAL HEALTH

### ABOUT LSSSI

The Louisiana Safe and Supportive Schools Initiative (LSSSI) is a four-year, federal grant-funded project intended to design and implement statewide measurements of, and targeted programmatic interventions to improve, school climate. Eight school districts were selected to participate in LSSSI: Caddo, East Baton Rouge, Jefferson, Lafayette, Lafourche, Plaquemines, Tangipahoa, and Terrebonne based on their school climate scores. The goals of the LSSSI Project are to create physically and emotionally safe and supportive school environments; improve learning conditions by reducing alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and violence on campus; provide students and staff with opportunities for meaningful participation; and foster a school environment where students may engage and excel both academically and socially. The LSSSI program is called *Positive Approaches for Safe and Supportive Schools (PASSS)*, and the strategies are designed to increase the capacity of school personnel to make data driven-decisions in selecting appropriate interventions to address school climate. To inform school decision-making, LSSSI created school-level school climate scores by measuring student perceptions of school climate dimensions (e.g., relationships, opportunities for meaningful participation at school, perceived violence, victimization, and substance use) and school-level discipline and attendance rates.



### What Are Social and Emotional Competencies (SEC)?

Youth are considered to have strong *social and emotional competencies* when they are able to gauge their own challenges and employ their own strengths in order to regulate internal emotional states; make and maintain friendships; demonstrate thoughtful decision making; apply themselves to achieve academic and social goals; and tolerate frustration to overcome academic and social challenges. *Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)* is a frame-

work for improving these social and emotional competencies through skill-focused instruction and coordinated supports within the school environment.<sup>1</sup>

Social and emotional skill building instruction is linked to students' improved academic achievement, improved pro-social behavior, and reductions in behavior problems.<sup>2</sup> SEL may be especially valuable for children who are most at risk for mental illness, which is especially important because nearly one in five adolescents experience impairments in his/her life functioning due to a diagnosable mental health disorder.<sup>3</sup> The majority of mental illnesses emerge in childhood,<sup>4</sup> yet less than half of children who suffer from mental illness actually receive treatment.<sup>5</sup>

Schools can help improve the academic and interpersonal functioning of all youth, including youth at highest risk of developing mental



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illness, by providing SEL within a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework that includes both prevention and intervention efforts. Highlighted herein are Local Education Agencies (LEAs) that have engaged in innovative, exemplary efforts to deliberately address students' social-emotional competencies and to improve and expand systems of mental health support in schools.

### SUPPORTING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES: WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Schools characterized by positive school climates, adequate social, emotional, and behavioral health supports, and coordinated systems for identifying, referring, and treating mental health promote the academic, social, and emotional outcomes of the youth they serve. Students' school climate perceptions are tied to their complete mental health status, with positive climate



perceptions associated with increases in their feelings of satisfaction with their lives, decreases in symptoms related to depression and anxiety, and decreases in aggressive behavior and rule breaking.<sup>6</sup>

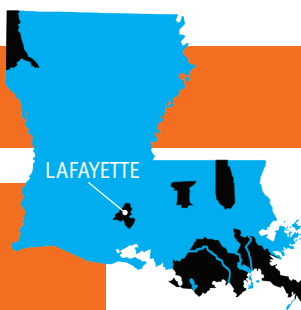
### CRITICAL STRATEGIES AND SUPPORTS

- District and school-level leaders have a vision for, and provide direction toward, a comprehensive, integrated system of supports for students' social, emotional, and mental health.
- Balanced prevention and intervention efforts within a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework (i.e., Tier 1: Universal Supports, Tier 2: Selective Supports, Tier 3: Indicated Supports).
- Standardized student referral process and procedures.
- School-level, multidisciplinary student care teams attended regularly by support staff, school administrators, and community partners.
- Integrated community partnerships with local youth-serving agencies (e.g., juvenile justice, county mental health, local faith-based and nonprofit partners) and local private mental health service providers.
- Selection of evidence-based social, emotional, and mental health-building prevention and intervention programs.
- Coaching for fidelity of program implementation.
- Family engagement, especially for students enrolled in more intensive Tier 2 (Selective) and Tier 3 (Indicated) interventions.
- Supports to ensure that youth are able to access therapeutic interventions, including assisting with his/her health insurance coverage, scheduling appointments, and confirming transportation.

### COMMON IMPLEMENTATION TENSIONS

- Beliefs among community members and school personnel that social, emotional, and mental health supports are not the responsibility of educators and distract from time spent on academics.
- Inconsistencies across state and local policies and practices governing mental health supports for children and youth.
- Stigma and misunderstandings among local community, educators, and students about mental health.
- Fissures in communication and support offerings across schools, local youth-serving agencies (e.g., juvenile justice, county mental health), and private mental health service providers.
- Reduced implementation fidelity of evidence-based programs.

## Lafayette Parish School System's Story



## IDENTIFYING MTSS EVIDENCE- BASED INTERVENTIONS

### LAFAYETTE PARISH DEMOGRAPHICS

Lafayette Parish is the fifth smallest parish in Louisiana by land area and third smallest by total area. It is located in southern Louisiana approximately 60 miles west of Baton Rouge. The Lafayette Parish School System serves 31,000 students in 33 K-12 schools. The majority of students are African American (43%) and White (50%) and come from rural, suburban, and urban neighborhoods and communities. The four high schools served by the LSSSI grant are all located in the city of Lafayette. Sixty-one percent of students are eligible for the free and reduced lunch program.

## CREATING A MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORT [MTSS]

Over the course of the LSSSI grant, from 2011 to 2014, Lafayette Parish School System (LPSS) transformed the structure and quality of its supports for social, emotional, and mental health. Guided by a philosophy that staff must work collaboratively and systematically to address the multidimensional needs of youth, Dr. Patrick Cooper, Superintendent, sought ways to reorganize the district to streamline student supports for maximum positive effect. Dr. Cooper identified a Task Force composed of local community members and LPSS staff who subsequently recognized an opportunity to improve the organization of the district's health and wellness-related service providers.

Dr. Cooper led an effort to consolidate student support service departments—mental health, counseling services, nursing services, Child Welfare and Attendance, and Section 504—into a single Health and Wellness Division, which is now led by a cross-disciplinary, collaborative team of support staff. An initial focus of the *Health and Wellness Division* was to create a district-wide model for health and wellness-related service delivery for secondary schools. For several months, the team worked to identify a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) approach for prevention and intervention to implement in the school district.

The Health and Wellness Division subsequently identified evidence-based interventions that were in alignment with the district's MTSS framework. In Tier 1 (Universal Supports), the team adopted *Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)*, a state-mandated program for promoting pro-social behavior, and *Signs of Suicide*, a peer education program intended to help students identify suicide risk in peers and reach out for help appropriately. For Tier 2 (Selective Supports), the team identified and adopted the following social and emotional programs: *Check In, Check Out; Ripple Effects; Teaching Kids to Cope; and Check and Connect*. Students are referred to Tier 2 interventions based on a match between the intervention's intended social and emotional outcomes and the student's presenting need (e.g., managing difficult emotions, building positive peer relationships). Finally, for Tier 3 (Indicated Supports) the team identified mental health service providers to provide individualized supports, including one-to-one therapeutic support as well as group therapy.

The Health and Wellness Division sought to improve the breadth and fidelity of social, emotional, and mental health services by reorganizing existing resources and adding additional resources to fit within the newly adopted district MTSS model. As a result of their recommendations, school social workers were added to ensure that every high school in Lafayette Parish School System had a full-time social worker responsible for coordinating and directly providing Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions.

## BUILDING MTSS CAPACITY

Even with added staffing, the need strained the capacity of school-based staff to provide these interventions with fidelity. Addressing this gap, the Health and Wellness Division restructured its community collaborations to support the newly adopted MTSS system. The district provided training for three Lafayette Sheriff Office employees to provide *Check and Connect* mentoring full-time for the purpose of preventing youth from entering the juvenile justice system. This partnership model represented a departure from earlier approaches where community partners provided fragmented direct services to students that were difficult to monitor and not aligned with district support services.



## BUILDING MTSS INFRASTRUCTURE AND PARTNERSHIPS



After making recommendations for an MTSS framework, the Health and Wellness Division moved on to determine a process and procedure for identifying and monitoring students' response to social, emotional, and mental health interventions. As a result, the district created *School-Based Health and Wellness Teams* that include school counselors, school social workers, administrators, and related external community members (e.g., private mental health service providers). The School-Based Health and Wellness Team is tasked with two types of meetings: (1) Internal meetings wherein the school team reviews new referrals and monitors the progress of students already in intervention, and (2) External meetings wherein parents and relevant support providers collaborate to write individualized student support plans that include Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions, as appropriate. To assist school teams with progress monitoring procedures, the Health and Wellness Division developed 'Review 360', a step-by-step process for reviewing student needs, monitoring intervention dosage and progress, and determining whether more intensive supports are required.

Finally, for students who have been involved with the juvenile justice system already and are considered to be at the highest level of social and emotional risk, the Health and Wellness Division has entered into a partnership with the Lafayette Parish Sheriff's Office and Lafayette County Juvenile Justice to ensure that any child who is being adjudicated for a crime receives social and emotional skill-building interventions, many of which are provided through the district's MTSS framework.

## CRITICAL LAFAYETTE STRATEGIES

### EFFECTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORTS

- School superintendent understands the impact that social and emotional competencies and mental health have on important school-related outcomes, such as academic achievement and school completion, and advocates effectively for social, emotional, and mental health supports.
- District's Health and Wellness Division coordinates social, emotional, and mental health-related supports provided by the district.

■ Health and Wellness Division works collaboratively and proactively to assist schools with implementation of Multi-Tiered System of Supports, including evidence-based programs and an effective referral and progress monitoring process.

- District provides a 'model of care' for schools to follow, and professional development to support the model's effective implementation. Professional development includes training on all evidence-based programs.
- Increase staffing of social workers and school counselors to 1:450 ratios, with an expanded role of providing and monitoring direct Tier 2 (Selective) and Tier 3 (Indicated) interventions.
- School-level Health and Wellness Teams follow standard procedures for referral, intervention assignment, and progress monitoring of students identified for Tier 2 (Selected) and Tier 3 (Indicated) intervention support.
- Partnerships with local community youth serving agencies, including juvenile justice, are realigned to be meaningfully integrated into district models for social, emotional, and mental health service provision. Partnerships create bridges across agencies that prevent students from entering juvenile justice, provide skill-building interventions to prevent future behavior incidents at school and crimes in the community, and quickly reintegrate students who are adjudicated for a crime.

## EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS

### UNIVERSAL

- PBIS ([pbis.org](http://pbis.org))
- Signs of Suicide ([mentalhealthscreening.org](http://mentalhealthscreening.org))

### SELECTIVE AND INDICATED

- Ripple Effects ([rippleeffects.com](http://rippleeffects.com))
- Check and Connect ([checkandconnect.umn.edu/](http://checkandconnect.umn.edu/))
- Check In, Check Out
- Teaching Kids to Cope



### Caddo Parish Public Schools (CPPS) District's Story

#### CADD0 PARISH DEMOGRAPHICS

Caddo Parish is situated in the northwest corner of Louisiana, close to the Texas and Arkansas borders, and is the third largest Parish in Louisiana. Caddo Parish Public School District (CPPS) serves over 40,000 students in 64 K-12 schools. Considered a suburban school district with the majority of schools within the city limits of Shreveport, some of the six high schools served through the LSSSI grant are rural schools as far as 38 miles from the metropolitan area. The majority of students are African American (63%) and White (32%), and 65% of students are eligible for the free and reduced lunch program.

#### BUILDING ON-SITE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Recognizing that many youth experience emotional and behavioral issues that interfere with learning, social relationships, and school bonding, and that school is the primary point of community contact for most students, CPPS initiated an effort to provide comprehensive, direct mental health services for students at their school sites. Through this effort, a district team led by Dr. Barzanna White, District School Psychologist and Prevention Coordinator, and Jill Waltemate, School Climate Coach, sought to eliminate the need for caregivers to transport their children to appointments outside of the school day; improve communication and collaboration between mental health service providers, families, and school personnel; and ultimately, improve student well-being.

The fundamental challenge was that there were not enough district resources to fund qualified staff to provide the services to all students who needed them. To this end, CPPS built strong, productive partnerships with local, community-based mental health service providers. Because approximately 90 percent of students identified and referred for Tier 2 or 3 interventions in CPPS are eligible for Medicaid, they started by identifying a mechanism for reimbursing licensed mental health providers who would

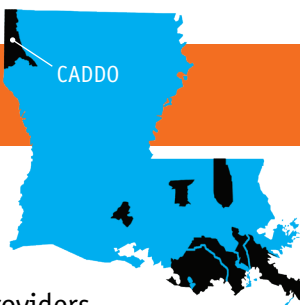
be willing to travel to the school sites. Through the Louisiana Behavioral Health Partnership (i.e., Magellan of Louisiana), licensed mental health professionals who are eligible for reimbursement through state Medicaid funding were identified.

#### ENSURING SERVICE QUALITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

After identifying providers and determining their ability to provide school-based services, CPPS worked through contract and client confidentiality-related concerns. Ultimately, CPPS elected to have all service providers sign yearly renewable contracts, which are then signed by the superintendent, school board members, and the school board president. CPPS also required background checks and fingerprinting as well as current documentation of licensure and professional liability insurance for all service providers. Finally, the local service providers agreed to take full responsibility for insurance billing for their services.



Regarding student confidentiality, CPPS determined that counseling-related documentation would not become part of a student's school record. Parents/guardians have freedom of choice in selecting their service provider. No student is mandated to attend counseling; participation is strictly voluntary. Because private mental health providers are not CPPS employees, parents/guardians are asked to sign a release that allows the school to share student information such as demographic data, grades, and discipline records. The release also allows the mental health provider, if appropriate, to work with teachers and other staff regarding issues that may occur in the classroom/school setting. This release is strictly voluntary and if parents choose not to sign, the rules that govern confidentiality for private mental health providers in Louisiana apply.



### MAKING SERVICES WORK ON SCHOOL SITES

After identifying and contracting with service providers, the team faced an additional challenge of locating appropriate spaces for the service providers to hold confidential meetings with students. With the will of school leaders in place, a variety of creative solutions were found. For instance, in one high school, textbooks were moved out of a storage closet to clear space for confidential meetings with students.

Understanding that the initial launch of new school-based programs and processes is the most challenging period, Ms. Waltemate provided on-site coaching to help generate referrals, mail packets to parents, and guide the daily ins-and-outs of program implementation. With the hands-on assistance and support in the early stages, the process very quickly became a part of the schools' daily routine and culture. Most staff members have come to rely on the mental health service providers for the extra assistance they provide to the students and see the positive impact the services have on their campuses.



As a result of the district's efforts, there are currently 10 licensed mental health professionals housed at eight Caddo schools providing direct mental health services to students. An additional mental health professional will be placed in Fall 2014. Additionally, Caddo maintains contracts with numerous mental health agencies

whose counseling staff are allowed to provide direct services to students on campuses throughout the parish. Rather than maintaining an office located on a single school site, these practitioners typically serve multiple schools throughout the district. Data from student and staff surveys administered annually suggest that schools in CPPS have made great strides in improving school climate. Part of that success is undoubtedly due to the fact that they have created a seamless framework for ensuring all students have access to mental health services and programs that address their unique needs.

### CRITICAL CADD0 STRATEGIES

#### Effective Infrastructure Supports

##### District Level

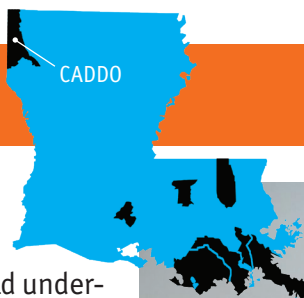
- Obtain the support of all key members of district governance, including the superintendent, directors, and school board members, through strategic communication and planning.
- Examine school level data with school leaders to determine the level of need for additional mental health supports. Prioritize placement of mental health service providers based on needs assessment across district.
- Contract with eligible local licensed mental health professionals to provide on-site services to students.
- Meet with school site administrators to determine willingness to appropriately manage all elements of the program, including locating space and managing referrals.
- Draft all legal documentation, including Memoranda of Understanding with service providers, referral forms, and information sharing agreements.
- Provide on-site coaching, especially during early stages of implementation.

##### School Level

- Schedule introductory meeting with mental health service provider and school staff to determine best fit.
- Determine service provision protocol, including referral protocol and frequency and length of sessions.
- Review referral process and necessary documentation required from parents/guardians.



## Social and Emotional Competencies and Mental Health



## Caddo Parish

- Assist mental health service provider in setting up office space at the school site.
- Conduct in-service with staff members to build understanding of important details of the service process, including referral process, student confidentiality, and scheduling.
- Introduce program and mental health service provider(s) to other faculty/staff at staff meetings or other times designated by principal.
- Introduce program to parents via school newsletter or during on-site school meetings (e.g., Back to School Night).



### KEY RESOURCES

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) <http://www.casel.org/>  
Youth Mental Health First Aid <http://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/cs/>  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices <http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/>  
National Association of School Psychologists, Resources for Educators <http://www.nasponline.org/educators/index.aspx>  
UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>  
National Technical Assistance Center for Children's Mental Health <http://gucchdtacenter.georgetown.edu/>  
Advancing Education Effectiveness: Interconnecting School Mental Health and School-wide Positive Behavior Support <https://www.pbis.org/school/school-mental-health/interconnected-systems>

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# Social and Emotional Competencies and Mental Health



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Safe and Supportive  
Schools Initiative  
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